

To: Members of Standards Committee      Date: 2 May 2014  
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Dear Member of the Committee,

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** to be held at **10.00 am** on **FRIDAY, 9 MAY 2014** in **CONFERENCE ROOM 1B, COUNTY HALL, WYNNSTAY ROAD, RUTHIN LL15 1YN**.

Yours sincerely

G. Williams  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

## AGENDA

### PART 1: THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THIS PART OF THE MEETING

#### 1 APOLOGIES

#### 2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at this meeting.

#### 3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

Notice of items which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

#### 4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (Pages 5 - 12)

To receive the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 21 March, 2014 (copy enclosed).

**5 SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL (Pages 13 - 48)**

To consider a report by the Monitoring Officer (copy enclosed) presenting a draft Social Media Protocol for Members and employees of the Council.

**6 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Pages 49 - 54)**

To consider a report by the Monitoring Officer (copy enclosed) informing the committee of the requirement placed upon Members in respect of the declaration of interests and the practical compliance with the requirement.

**7 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

To note the attendance by members of the Standards Committee at County, Town and Community Council and to receive their reports.

**8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Standards Committee is scheduled for 10.00 a.m. on Friday 18 July 2014 in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin.

**PART 2: CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

It is recommended in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it is likely that exempt information as defined in paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed.

**9 CODE OF CONDUCT - PART 3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 (Pages 55 - 56)**

To consider a confidential report by the Monitoring Officer (copy enclosed) providing an overview of complaints against members lodged with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

**MEMBERSHIP**

Independent Members:

Rev Wayne Roberts, Mr Ian Trigger (Chair), Ms Margaret Medley and Mrs Paula White

Town/Community Council Member  
Councillor David E Jones

County Councillors  
Councillor Bill Cowie  
Councillor Colin Hughes

**COPIES TO:**

All Councillors for information  
Press and Libraries  
Town and Community Councils

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## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Conference Room 1B, County Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Friday, 21 March 2014 at 10.00 am.

### PRESENT

Independent Members Mrs Margaret Medley, Mr Ian Trigger (Chair), Mrs Paula White, Community Councillor David E. Jones and County Councillor Bill Cowie.

### ALSO PRESENT

Monitoring Officer (GW), Deputy Monitoring Officer and Solicitor (LJ) and Administrative Officer (CIW).

#### 1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Wayne Roberts and Colin Hughes

#### 2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor W.L. Cowie, the Monitoring Officer agreed to note in the file of the Register of interests that an anonymous gift, under the value of £25, had been delivered to Councillor Cowie's home address

#### 3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

#### 4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Standards Committee held on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2014 were submitted.

Accuracy:-

In response to a question from Councillor W.L. Cowie, the Committee agreed that reference in the minutes to "Town and Community Councils" be amended to read "City, Town and Community Councils."

**RESOLVED** – that, subject to the above, the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

## **5 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES**

A copy of a report by the Monitoring Officer (MO), on the Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales 2012/13 which had been published in February, 2014, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The report provided an overview of the work of the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) and contained summaries of the cases and appeals it had dealt with over the last year. The report had been included as Appendix.

The MO explained that the APW, set up under the Local Government Act 2000, had two statutory functions. The first to form case or interim case tribunals to consider reports from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) following the investigation of allegations that a Member had failed to comply with the relevant Authority's Code of Conduct. The most serious allegations of breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct were considered by the APW. The second function was to consider appeals from Members against the decisions of local Standards Committees following a referral by the PSOW.

During 2012/13 the APW had received five new referrals and four cases carried over from the previous financial year 2011/12. Seven of the cases had been heard during the period covered by the report and summaries had been provided. Five hearings had been summarised in the report, with the matter relating to Coedpoeth Community Council having involved three of the complaints.

The APW had received one appeal against a decision of a local Standards Committee and a summary of the case had been set out in the report. All the cases had involved findings that the Member concerned had by their actions brought their office or Authority into disrepute, and two had breached the requirement to show respect and consideration to others. This had been consistent with the general themes emerging from the analysis set out in the report of the different types of misconduct considered by the Panel since 2002. The three most prevalent areas of misconduct had been:-

Paragraph 6, bringing the office or authority into disrepute.

Paragraph 4, failing to show respect, having regard to equality of opportunity and bullying.

Paragraphs 11 and 14, declaration of interests.

Three of the matters had been breaches involving the use of social media by Members. One of the cases summarised related to a former Denbighshire Councillor and a full report had been included on the Panel's website. As an annex to the report the APW had provided a summary of the sanctions imposed by the case tribunals and appeal tribunals in the period October, 2002 to March, 2013. Significant sanctions had been imposed by the APW during that period and only a minority of matters had not resulted in suspension or disqualification.

The MO provided a detailed summary of the APW Annual Report which included:-

- Local Government Act 2000.
- Principles of Conduct Code of Conduct.
- Role of the PPSOW.
- Role of the APW.
- Membership details of the APW.
- Allegations of misconduct:-
  - Overview
  - Summary of Case Tribunals 2012 - 2013
  - Summary of Appeals Tribunals 2012 - 2013
  - On-going Cases
- Overview of procedures.
- Support Unit.

Matters arising from discussion included:-

- The provision of equality training for Elected Members, and a report to County Council requesting guidance as whether or not such training should be mandatory.
- Councillor W.L. Cowie highlighted the importance of Elected Members ensuring that any comments made verbally or written did not breach the Code of Conduct.
- The Deputy MO referred to Page 12 of the report, Figure 3: Breaches by type October to March, 2013. She invited attention to sections relating to “Failed to lead by example (local provision)” and “Failure to have regard for Standards Committee advice”, and explained that it appeared that some Local Authorities in Wales had amended their Code of Conduct accordingly. The MO agreed to provide clarification regarding the two local provisions through the Monitoring Officers Network.
- In response to a question from the Chair, the MO confirmed that there was very little variance between the different Codes of Conduct of the various Local Authorities.
- The MO explained that there was a requirement in the Act to have a Code of Conduct which must incorporate all the provisions of the model Code to which additions could be included.
- In reply to a question from the Chair, the MO agreed to provide details of how many of the cases listed in the report had been subject to an appeal to the High Court. The MO explained that details of the full judgements were available on the APW website.

Following further discussion, it was:-

**RESOLVED** –that the:-

- (a) *Standards Committee receives and notes the contents of the Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales, and*
- (b) *Monitoring Officer seek clarification in respect of:-*
  - *the number of cases listed in the report which had been subject to a High Court appeal.*
  - *the sections in the Figure 3: Breaches by type October to March, 2013, which related to “Failed to lead by example (local provision)” and “Failure to have regard for Standards Committee advice”.*

*(G. Williams to Action)*

## **6 PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES' CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK**

A copy of a report by the Monitoring Officer (MO), on the introduction of a Code of Conduct Casebook by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW), had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The PSOW had previously published a quarterly casebook detailing complaints investigated in respect of maladministration in the delivery of public services. It enabled Authorities and the public to understand how complaints had been addressed and the measures introduced to resolve them. Requests had been made for a casebook to be published for work undertaken by the PSOW in investigating complaints made in relation to the conduct of Elected Members.

The new Code of Conduct casebook would be published twice annually and contain summaries of all cases where the PSOW had completed an investigation in the previous six months. Where cases had been referred to a Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales, an electronic link would be provided to the full report of the outcome of the case produced by the relevant Committee or Panel.

The publication of the summaries would assist Members and others in considering whether circumstances they may be experiencing amounted to a breach of the Code. Details of the PSOW guidance on the Code, which it was hoped would assist in providing a better understand of the operation of the Code, had been incorporated in the report. The casebook would enable Standards Committees access to information about the manner in which other Standards Committees imposed sanctions and disposed of cases, and explain why in some cases the PSOW may decline to investigate alleged breaches on the basis that previous similar allegations had not resulted in a sanction.

The first edition of the casebook, Appendix 1, contained details of matters where the PSOW had completed an investigation and issued a report between April and November, 2013. The majority of breaches complained of in this edition of the Code of Conduct casebook related to the requirement to show respect and consideration to others and the registration and disclosure of interests.

A detailed summary of the implications arising from Case reference 200802503, included on page 14 of the report, was provided by the MO. The Chair referred to Case reference 201201768 and expressed the view that if the evidence was contradictory, then the matter should have been pursued. The MO endorsed the view expressed by the Chair and made reference to the summary provided having been somewhat brief.

The MO explained that substantial proportion of the cases referred to related to City, Town and Community Councils, and he emphasised the importance of the provision of training for the respective Members. An outline of the training provided, and future proposed schedule of training and presentations, was provided for Members of the Committee. The Chair explained that the standard of training

provided by the MO and Deputy MO was of an excellent standard. Members of the Committee endorsed the views expressed regarding the need and importance of the provision of training.

**RESOLVED** – that Members note the introduction of a Code of Conduct casebook and the contents of the first edition.

## 7 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Members of the Committee were invited to feedback from the County, Town and Community Council meetings that they had recently attended and Members took the opportunity to offer a summary of how the respective Councils had operated.

Councillor W.E. Cowie attended the following meetings and provided the following summaries:-

Prestatyn Town Council, 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2014:- The meeting had been well conducted and there had been no issues of concerns to report. Members of the public had been in attendance and Councillor Cowie reported that he had been impressed with the format of the agenda.

Rhuddlan Town Council, 13 February, 2014:- The meeting had been well attended with members of the public also present. The Mayor had at the commencement of reminded Members of the need to read the Code of Conduct and the relevance of Standing Orders. Councillor Cowie referred to the lack of reference to the accuracy and matters arising of the minutes of the previous meeting, the understanding of the Town Plan and he expressed concern regarding some of the decision making processes adopted.

City of St Asaph Council, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2014:- Councillor Cowie reported that the meeting had been well conducted and no issues of concern had arisen.

Councillor D.E. Jones attended the following meeting and provided the following summary:-

Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd Community Council, 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2014:- Councillor D.E. Jones informed Members that the Community Council currently had two vacancies and that the attendance at the meeting had been poor. The meeting had been positive and conducted in an informal manner, with the principal concern of the Members relating to the future of the local primary school.

Having been requested to speak at the meeting Councillor Jones had taken the opportunity to explain that the attendance of Standards Committee Members at meetings was to provide encouragement and support to the respective Councils. He had also highlighted the importance of the Code of Conduct and the provision of training for Chairs and Members of the Councils.

The suggestion was made that the possibility of providing the respective City, Town and Community Councils, with details of the purpose of the attendance of Standards Committee Members at meetings be examined. Individual Members

provided details of how they introduce themselves, and the information they convey, when representing the Standards Committee at City, Town and Community Council meetings.

**RESOLVED** – *that the Standards Committee receive and note the feedback submitted from recent meetings attended by Members of the Committee.*

## **8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Standards Committee would be held on Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 at 10.00 a.m. in Conference Room 1b, County Hall, Ruthin.

A copy of the timetable for County Council meetings for 2014 to 2015 was circulated to Members of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that the following business items be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Standards Committee:-

- (i) Social Media Guidance.
- (ii) Audit of Declarations of Interest.

**RESOLVED** – *that the Standards Committee confirms that:-*

- (a) *the next meeting of the Standards Committee be held on Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2014, and*
- (b) *business items relating to Social Media Guidance and Audit of Declarations of Interest be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Standards Committee.*

## **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** – *that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.*

## **PART II**

### **9 CODE OF CONDUCT - PART 3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000**

A copy of a confidential report by the Monitoring Officer (MO), which provided an overview of complaints lodged with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Standards Committee had previously requested to be regularly informed of the level of complaints lodged with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).

The tables incorporated in Appendix 1 provided an overview of complaints lodged since the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2012.

It was confirmed by the MO that Case Reference 207, 208 and 209 under the On-going heading in Appendix 1 had now been completed. The MO provided details of Case Reference 249, a complaint made by a member of the public against an Elected Member.

The MO informed the Committee of the first Local Resolution of a complaint, which had been resolved amicably following agreement with the respective parties.

***RESOLVED*** –that the Standards Committee receive and note the contents of the report.

Meeting ended at 11.20 a.m.

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**Report To:** Standards Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014

**Lead Member / Officer:** Monitoring Officer

**Report Author:** Monitoring Officer

**Title:** Social Media Protocol

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**1. What is the report about?**

1.1 The report is about a draft Social Media Protocol for Members and employees of the Council.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1 To give the Members on the Standards Committee an opportunity to consider the contents of the current draft Social Media Protocol and to provide their comments and observations.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

3.1 That Members consider the draft Social Media Protocol attached as Appendix 1 to the report and provide comments and observations on the draft.

**4. Report details.**

4.1 The use of social media in all walks of life has become an accepted form of communication and engagement.

4.2 There is an increasing appetite amongst many sections of society to access information and to communicate through the various forms of social media such as Twitter, Facebook etc.

4.3 Social media is a term which describes easy ways to publish information on the internet. The term is generally used to describe how individuals, companies and other bodies share information and create discussions online.

4.4 The ease with which information can be distributed in this way and the growing numbers of people who use social media to access information means that the way in which Councils and Councillors interact with the public will change.

4.5 Although there are many benefits to the use of social media, there are potential pitfalls that await the unwary. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, in his guidance on the Code of Conduct makes repeated reference to the use of social media. The Ombudsman reminds members that the Code of

Conduct applies to their activities online in the same way that it applies to other aspects of their role.

- 4.6 Many authorities have issued guidance to Members about the use of social media. These documents vary between being extensions to the Code of Conduct and Ombudsman's advice to more holistic documents advising of the potential uses of social media whilst containing sections dedicated to the potential conduct issues.
- 4.7 There is a potential for increased engagement through social media if the Council adopts a policy of webcasting its meetings. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of webcasting engages sections of the community who rely on receiving their information online and may wish to communicate with the Council and Councillors through social media.
- 4.8 Guidance was previously produced for elected Members in 2010 regarding the use of social media. A copy of this Guidance is attached as Appendix 2 to this report. In June of 2013 the Committee received a report on the use of social media and resolved that a protocol document be compiled for consideration by the Committee incorporating the Welsh Local Government Association Guidance which had previously been circulated and which is attached as Appendix 3 to the report. Soon after this resolution, work being done elsewhere in the Council on safeguarding identified the need for a protocol for staff in respect of the use of social media from a safeguarding point of view. It was also considered that the use of social media was an important communication tool for the Council and that a protocol should be developed to guide members of staff in the use of social media. Since these three strands were being developed independently of each other it was agreed that, if possible, a single Social Media Policy should be adopted which could contain appendices relevant to different users of social media including elected Members.
- 4.9 The draft Social Media Policy attached as Appendix 1 has been developed by the Corporate Communications team with input from officers involved in safeguarding as well as standards issues.
- 4.10 Members will note that the Policy consists of a General Policy document giving general advice. The document is supported by appendices which give specific advice for the use of social media in different circumstances and in particular includes, at Appendix B, specific guidance drawn up for elected Members by the Welsh Government Association.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

- 5.1 The increase of the use of social media will enable the Council to communicate its priorities to a wider audience and will contribute to the priority of modernising the Council.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1 There are no costs directly associated with this report.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?**

7.1 This report does not require an equalities impact assessment.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1 Consultations have been carried with Scrutiny and others.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1 There are no obvious significant financial implications arising from the report

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1 The use of social media by officers and Members does carry potential risks, many of which are highlighted in the Policy itself. The advice and guidance contained within the Policy and appendices give practical guidance and advice which, if followed, should reduce the risk associated with the use social media. The risk to the Council of not making appropriate and efficient use of social media is that it will not be delivering key messages to some members of the community who access the majority or all of their information on-line.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

11.1 There is no decision required.

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## Social Media Policy

For Staff and Elected Members of Denbighshire County Council

Date: January 2014  
Version:  
Status: Draft 3  
Author: Gareth Watson  
Email: [gareth.watson@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:gareth.watson@denbighshire.gov.uk)  
Approved by:

## **1. Foreword**

- 1.1 Communication is a strategic priority for the Council, especially during current challenging times of change.
- 1.2 In those times of change, there is more need than ever for effective two way communications and for marketing the Council's services and activities. This in itself presents the Council with many challenges.
- 1.3 We need to communicate and consult more effectively with our residents and key stakeholders and we want to do that through channels that are relevant, popular and provide opportunities for the Council to disseminate messages quickly to the correct audiences and as widely as possible.
- 1.4 Social Media is one of the most effective ways of delivering on this aim and it forms an important part of the overarching Communications Strategy adopted by the Council in 2013. Social Media has been embedded into the day to day work of the Destination, Marketing and Communications team, although a large number of other services/projects are using this medium.
- 1.5 But it's not only about communicating. Social media is an effective way of consulting and engaging with local residents, community groups and associations. Increasing numbers of people are using social media to express their opinions and views, as well as using it as a way to gather intelligence and information on local issues that matter to them. That is why the Council must exploit this opportunity to consult and engage, as well as communicate.
- 1.6 This policy identifies the acceptable use of social media and social networking including clear guidelines for employees and aims to assist managers in terms of managing performance when dealing with matters associated with the use of social media.
- 1.7 This policy also aims to ensure that a fair and consistent approach is applied to all employees, Members and volunteers working on behalf of the Council. But most of all, it considers the benefits of using social media as part of our day to day work, but also highlights some of the pitfalls that we need to be aware of as we go about our day to day business.
- 1.8 Specific guidance has been drawn up for Members by the Welsh Local Government Association. Please refer to Appendix B.
- 1.9 This policy will be reviewed every 12 months.

## **2. What is social media?**

- 2.1 Social media is used to share content, opinions, personal/professional profiles, comments, and links to other media online. The growth of social media brings with it the opportunity to communicate in new ways, and to reach residents who do not engage using traditional communication channels.
- 2.2 Social media includes (but is not limited to):
- Blogs (personal and professional)
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - YouTube
  - LinkedIn
  - Tumblr
  - Personal websites
  - Reddit
  - Wikis
  - Podcasts
  - Online forums
- 2.3 What all these things have in common is that they allow you to have online conversations and interactions with individuals and groups of people.
- 2.4 You can use social media to help get feedback on proposals or campaigns, to gather a following and engage with them about specific issues, or encourage people to attend an event.

## **3. The Benefits and Risks of using social media.**

- 3.1 There are a number of key benefits to using social media.
- Modern method of communication
  - Dissemination of timely messages instantaneously
  - Reach a wide audience
  - Effective way of communicating
  - Consultation tool
  - Engagement tool
  - The ability to follow/monitor accounts of partner organisations
  - Great opportunity to market Denbighshire County Council and its activities
  - Promotion of council-run events.
  - Ideal forum for communicating messages during an emergency.
  - Re-tweeting messages from other social media accounts.

3.2 There are also a number of risks associated to using social media.

- More opportunity for people to criticise the Council in an open forum
- Greater risk for the Council's reputation through providing foras for discussion and debate
- You have limited control on managing feedback made to your postings.
- People can use social media for negative gossip that could affect the Council's reputation.

3.3 However, there are a number of issues that need to be considered from a legal, data protection and safeguarding perspective.

3.4 **Legal** - There can be legal implications to using social media inappropriately, and you may find yourself liable if you don't follow the relevant legislation. Make sure you are aware of your responsibilities under the laws of defamation, copyright, discrimination, contract, human rights and protection from harassment (this list is not exhaustive), and most importantly, the Council's Codes of Conduct for staff and Members. The guide produced by the WLGA makes reference to legal implications for Members.

3.5 **Data Protection** – The Council must ensure that all of its employees adhere to the Data Protection Act. Staff and Members should ensure that no personal information relating to any individual should be released without their express consent for the Council to do so. The strongest, and safest, advice is to avoid using personal information on social media. Once information has been published, it is difficult to retract.

3.6 **Safeguarding children and young people**

Professionals working with the county need to be aware of the safeguarding issues related to using social media. The blurring of boundaries between Personal, Private and Professional information shared on social media sites can place individuals vulnerable to challenge and possible disciplinary action.

Further guidance on safeguarding children and young people and the use of social media can be found in Appendix C.

#### **4. Social media in your personal life**

- 4.1 The council recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the council, employees must be aware that they can damage the reputation of the council if they are recognised as being one of our employees.
- 4.2 Employees are allowed to say that they work for the council and the council recognise that from time to time that they may wish to discuss elements of their profession/expertise. However, if employees do discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or the sector in which the council operates), they should include on their profile a statement along the following lines: "The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."
- 4.3 Any communications that employees make in a personal capacity through social media must not: breach confidentiality, do anything that could be considered discriminatory, bullying or harassment, bring the council into disrepute and/or breach copyright.
- 4.4 The personal image you present in social media may reflect badly on the image of the authority. We advise you to:

- Show yourself in your best light

By identifying yourself as a council employee within a social network, you are now connected to your colleagues, managers, and often residents and the rest of the world. Make sure that any content associated with you is consistent with your work for the council.

- Use discretion

Be discrete in all personal communications in social media. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the council.

Avoid use of your council email address, logos or other council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only by using a disclaimer.

- Know your obligations

You must follow council policies and legislation when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and information policies, and must adhere to the Data Protection Act and other relevant legislation.

- Show respect to all

You should be respectful of the authority and your fellow employees, Members, volunteers and the public. Derogatory comments are always wrong. All employees and Councillors must familiarise themselves with the Respect Booklet (available on the intranet), which offers guidance on equality, diversity, and respect.

Before you post anything on social media – make sure your online activities do not interfere with your job and that it does not impact on services to residents.

The Code of Conduct for Staff can be found by clicking on the following link:

**[http://intranet-ad/sorce/apps/sorce\\_doc\\_manager/Actions/view\\_doc.aspx?docid=1281&revid=1297](http://intranet-ad/sorce/apps/sorce_doc_manager/Actions/view_doc.aspx?docid=1281&revid=1297)**

The Code of Conduct for Members is contained within Part 5 of the Council's Constitution and can be found by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/your-council/about-the-council/council-constitution-en.pdf>

Please bear in mind that official postings made on behalf of Denbighshire must adhere to the Council's Welsh Language policy, unless you are responding to a direct comment made to the Council by an external individual or organisation. In that instance, you should respond in the language that the comment was made.

## **5. Enforcement of this policy**

5.1 This policy relies on officers and members acting responsibly and in line with this policy. The Staff Code of Conduct (available from the HR Direct section of the intranet) and the Members' Code of Conduct provide the foundation for these guidelines for using social media. The same rules that apply to your actions in general, as found in the Codes of Conduct, apply to your conduct online.

5.2 Any council employee or volunteer who participates in online communication deemed not to be in the best interest of Denbighshire County Council will be subject to disciplinary action. This could include (but is not limited to):

- posting confidential council information online, or
- inaccurate, distasteful, or defamatory remarks about the council.

Whilst the Council respects the rights of an employee or volunteer to have an opinion, careful consideration must be made to ensure that any remarks do not bring the Council into disrepute.

All volunteers working for the Council have a duty to adhere to corporate guidelines and policies and this is the position with this policy.

- 5.3 Where you have concerns that colleagues are breaching this policy or the Code of Conduct, we encourage you to raise these concerns under the Whistleblowing procedure.
- 5.4 Councillors must remember that they are subject to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of duties of confidentiality and a requirement to treat everyone with respect and consideration. If a councillor fails to follow these guidelines, it can lead to an investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman in Wales and possible sanctions, such as suspension or loss of office. Members also have a duty to report any breaches of the code by other Members.
- 5.5 We monitor internet use across the council, and investigate the top users more closely to see the length of time it has been used and the sites accessed. If we discover any inappropriate or excessive use of the internet, the matter will be escalated to the individual's manager or above, and could lead to the individual's internet account being locked down for a period of time and/or a disciplinary investigation.

## **6. Before you get started - Things to keep in mind**

1. Identify yourself in your online communication, giving your name and, where relevant, your role within Denbighshire when you discuss council related matters. Write in the first person, and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Denbighshire County Council.
2. If you publish content to any website outside of Denbighshire County Council and it has something to do with your work/council services, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Denbighshire County Council's plans or opinions."
3. Be wary of overusing social media to promote your event/services – this can be seen as 'spamming', or unwanted advertising, and can create a negative impression.
4. Respect copyright laws (including use of copyrighted images) and be careful not to plagiarise another's work.
5. Never post confidential information online. You must not refer to any clients, contractors or partners without their permission.
6. Most social media sites require users to agree to terms of service. You are responsible for reading and complying with the terms of service of sites you use.

7. Some sites, such as LinkedIn, allow people to "recommend" current or former co-workers. Any references given should be in accordance with Denbighshire County Council References Policy and Procedure. Any character references given must be from a personal perspective, in line with the policy.
8. Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the council's workplace.
9. You must follow the council's Welsh Language Scheme, which clearly states that any public-facing information must be treated as equal and must appear bilingually. The only exception is in an emergency, when information can be issued in English first, with the Welsh to follow as quickly as possible. Information must be identical in both English and Welsh. If you are asked for information via social media, you should respond in the language in which the request was made.

## **7. Examples**

Below are some examples of how social media should not be used.

Give serious consideration before joining social media groups that have been set up with the sole intention of criticising the authority.

Bear in mind that joining certain groups could result in a conflict of interest with your day to day work responsibilities in future.

Social workers and teachers should not have children and young people/ pupils/students in their list of friends or contacts on social media.

## **8. Training on Social Media**

The Council is drawing up guidance on the use of social media for staff. That work is under development.

Members have already received social media training as part of their development programme.

Any member of staff or councillor requiring training on any aspect of social media should contact the Destination, Marketing and Communications Team on 01824 70(6222)

## **8. Useful contacts**

- Destination, Marketing and Communications Team, ext 6222/6007
- Web Team, ext 2672/6181/2623
- HR Direct on (INSERT NUMBER)

## Appendix C

### Safeguarding

Denbighshire County Council encourages positive use of social media. employees members and volunteers who work to support the council in discharging its duties should uphold the values and reputation of their profession and the policies and procedures set out in the county Social Media Policy.

Denbighshire County Council recognises the opportunities and challenges social media presents to all staff that work and support the council.

The development of a professional relationship and upholding and maintaining this reputation together with maintaining professional boundaries, the sharing of information, confidentiality and managing risk and challenging discrimination are issues when using social media and form part of the professional role and reputation of Denbighshire County Council.

Staff and volunteers must be aware of the possible risks to their own practice and service users, when using social media as a way of communicating with staff, services users and particularly the vulnerable and young people.

A professions working with the county need to be aware of the safeguarding issues related to using social media. The blurring of boundaries between Personal, Private and Professional information shared on social media sites can place individuals vulnerable to challenge and possible disciplinary action.

Staff and Volunteers need to:

1. Understand the potential benefits and disadvantages of social media in their own work and communication with service users.
2. ensure that their online presence is professionally appropriate.
3. use social media as a positive platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge and to promote their own profession positively.
4. act as an ambassador for the work of the county council
5. maintain appropriate and personal and professional boundaries in their work with service users other individuals and employer
6. consider personal and work communication between “service users” being kept separate for example it is not acceptable to accept a service user as an online friend or on a personal network as it creates a personal relationship outside of the workplace. Examples of service users are:

- Social Worker / Child
  - Teacher / Child
  - Taxi Driver / Child
7. be responsible for understanding how to use social media, checking personal security settings and the implications of social media being a public and permanent record. Privacy of communication should consider the use of the “phone” for interaction rather than social media at times.
  8. be vigilant to keep their own identity safe and that of friends and family. Consideration should be given to putting personal information on sites such as work. For example photographs, contact details, family details thought should be given to the implications of such action and loss of your own privacy and others?
  9. alert their employer / manager to any concerns they may have about the use of social media at an individual employee level including issues of gossip relating to work or potential risk to the workplace or county.
  10. share information appropriately and be responsible for what they post using their professional judgement. Make clear in any communication on social media that views expressed are a “personal view” and not necessarily the views of the employer thought should be given to adding a disclaimer which makes clear the views expressed are not necessarily the views of the employer. What ever you write must be able to stand public scrutiny and not bring your employer in to disrepute.
  11. know what support and action will be taken by the employer if they experience abuse, harassment or hate mail as a result of their work, the county will apply the harassment policy in these circumstances.

## Social Media Guidelines

### For employees and members of Denbighshire County Council

#### Introduction

The widespread availability of social media has brought the opportunity to engage and communicate in new ways and to reach residents who do not engage using traditional communications channels. It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly.

However, it is also important to ensure that we balance this with our legal responsibilities and our reputation. It is important that officers and members are aware that there are a number of legal implications associated with the inappropriate use of social media. Liability can arise under the laws of defamation, copyright, discrimination, contract, human rights and protection from harassment (this list is not exhaustive).

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that:

- Social media is exploited for business use in ways that are safe and in ways that will cultivate creativity and innovation.
- The council is not exposed to legal and governance issues.
- The council's reputation is not adversely affected.
- Council officers and members have clear guidelines about what is permitted when using social media.
- Users can identify what social media information is legitimately from the council.

#### Definition of social media

Social media is essentially: "the online tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people."<sup>1</sup>

Social media includes (but is not limited to):

- Blogs (personal and professional)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- MySpace
- Ebay
- Personal websites
- Digg

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Solis, 2007 <http://www.webpronews.com/blogtalk/2007/06/29/the-definition-of-social-media>  
10.12.2010

The feature that all these tools, websites and services have in common is that they facilitate conversations and online interactions between groups of people.

## Terms of Use

The council recognises that social media applications can be useful tools for communication and are used by many officers and members. Therefore, the council allows access to these sites.

Officers and members may access personal social media sites on work premises for their own use, provided that this is in their own time, is outside normal working hours (employees should be clocked out if on the flexi system), is not excessive, and observes the restrictions outlined below. Use of equipment for council business **must** take priority. (Please see under Enforcement).

To ensure that we manage our social media responsibly, all proposals for implementing any social media applications must be made to Corporate Communications by completing the Request Form for Social Media Applications. For more information, contact Corporate Communications on ext 6125 or [public.relations@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:public.relations@denbighshire.gov.uk).

Officers and members must also ensure they comply with the rules of the council's Internet Use and Monitoring Policy.

## Useful information

1. Identify yourself—name and, when relevant, role with Denbighshire - when you discuss council related matters. And write in the first person. You must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Denbighshire County Council.
2. If you publish content to any website outside of Denbighshire County Council and it has something to do with the work you do or services associated with the council, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Denbighshire County Council's positions, strategies or opinions." Again, ensure that you comply with the rules of the council's Internet Use and Monitoring Policy.
3. Respect copyright laws.
4. Don't provide confidential or other proprietary information. Councillors must remember that they are subject to the Members Code of Conduct in respect of duties of confidentiality. Officers must also remember that they are also bound by the Officers Code of Conduct in respect of disclosure of information.
5. Most social media sites require users to agree to Terms of Service. The council holds you responsible for reading, knowing and complying with the terms of service of sites you use.
6. Some sites, such as LinkedIn, allow people to "recommend" current or former co-workers. Any references given should be in accordance with Denbighshire County Council References Policy and Procedure. Any character references given must be from a personal perspective, as per the policy.
7. You are not to make reference to any clients, contractors or partners without obtaining their express permission to do so.
8. Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the council's workplace.
9. Be aware of your association with the council in online social networks. If you identify yourself as a council representative, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and customers.

10. Any council representative who participates in online communication deemed not to be in the best interest of Denbighshire County Council will be subject to disciplinary action. This online communication can include but is not limited to:
- Confidential council information
  - Inaccurate, distasteful, or defamatory remarks about the council.

## **Enforcement**

This policy relies on officers and members acting responsibly and in accordance with the above guidelines. Where you have concerns that colleagues are acting in breach of the above guidelines, you are encouraged to raise these concerns under the council's Whistleblowing procedure.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines by officers of the council may be considered misconduct and could lead to disciplinary action being taken under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures, which may result in dismissal.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines by councillors may be considered to be a breach of the Members Code of Conduct which could lead to an investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman in Wales and possible sanctions such as suspension or loss of office. If a member is in any doubt about the appropriateness of their conduct in using such online communication tools they can contact the council's Monitoring Officer for advice. Members are also under a duty to report any breaches of the code by other members, providing there is reasonable belief.

Internet use will be monitored regularly and the top users investigated more closely for length of time used and sites accessed. If there is a persistent issue, the matter will be escalated to the manager and, if needs be, to the manager's manager and could lead to the individual's internet account being locked down for a period of time and/or a disciplinary investigation.

Any concerns raised will be investigated under the appropriate procedures.

## **Useful contacts**

- Corporate Communications, ext 6125
- Customer Care/Web Team, ext 2672
- ICT, ext 2688
- Monitoring Officer, ext 2562

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# **Social Media: A Guide for Councillors**

August 2013

# Contact

## Welsh Local Government Association

The WLGA's primary purposes are to promote a better local government, its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy.

It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales with the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities as associate members.

### Welsh Local Government Association

Local Government House  
Drake Walk  
Cardiff  
CF10 4LG

Tel: 029 2046 8600  
Fax: 029 2046 8601

[www.wlga.gov.uk](http://www.wlga.gov.uk)

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*We are indebted to the officers and members who have contributed to this guide, particularly the members participating in the WLGA training for members in social media, the member support officer network, LLG and monitoring officers and SOCITIM. Also to Kevin O'Keefe from EXCELA INTERIM MANAGEMENT & CONSULTANCY LTD [www.excela.co.uk](http://www.excela.co.uk) who has contributed to the guide and delivered the training programme.*

*Due to the rapid developments in this area this guide will be regularly updated. Suggestions for inclusion are welcomed and further training for members is available from the WLGA. Contact Sarah Titcombe Organisational and Personal development Adviser - 029 2046 8638 [sarah.titcombe@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.titcombe@wlga.gov.uk)*

## Foreword

I'm delighted to present this useful guidance on social media which gives councillors a clear idea about what these tools are and how we can use them. There are some great ideas to help us think about how we make the most of these effective and cheap forms of communication.

Social media has changed the way we work in Monmouthshire. All of our employees and members have permission to use social media at any time so that they can make the most of what channels like Twitter and Facebook offer.

<http://acedigitalcomms.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/unrestricted-staff-access-to-social-media-access-a-roundup/>

In short, they're an easy way to talk and to listen to our residents, local businesses and other partner organisations. Without access to these tools we would be a weaker organisation as we would not hear what people in our communities care about, what they want to get involved with and what they think of their council.

Social media has given us a chance to be creative and try new things. Our foster carers in Monmouthshire use Yammer to stay connected and learn from each other.

<http://monmouthshirecc.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/rewind-story-fostering-communication-using-yammer/>

We use YouTube for our budget consultations.

<http://digitalmon.wordpress.com/2013/01/13/youtubing-a-budget-consultation-and-how-a-great-blogger-helped-us-get-better/>

We even recruited our current head of children's services using YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn.

<http://acedigitalcomms.wordpress.com/2011/07/11/social-care-recruiting-using-social-media-how-monmouthshire-council-is-recruiting-a-head-of-childrens-services-using-youtube/>

I use Twitter and my blog to connect with residents, other councillors and farmers and people who share my interests. I really see the value of this form of communicating – social media is now a legitimate business tool.

<http://digitalmon.wordpress.com/2013/01/12/councillor-peter-fox-leader-of-the-council-talking-about-social-media/>

I hope you enjoy this very informative guide.



### **Councillor Peter Fox**

Leader Monmouthshire County Council  
WLGA Spokesperson for ICT and Digital  
Inclusion

## Introduction

A revolution is taking place in how we communicate. The world is experiencing the biggest ever change in how information is created and owned, as well as the speed in which it can be shared. This is changing the way we live, work and even how we speak and think.

This guide is for Councillors who would like to use social media as a tool to share information, open new dialogues with the people in their community and beyond, and engage their electorate in productive two-way conversation.

We live in an open, accessible and dynamic communications world. The use of social media will help ensure your voice is heard.

### 1. What is social media?

Social media is a blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia tools that are used for creating content and two-way communication. They can be accessed via your smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or smart TV. All social media accounts are free of charge and can be set up quickly and easily from an Internet page. Although this guide will focus on Facebook and Twitter, some useful examples of social media include:

**Blogs** which are like an online diary journal where you can share information. Examples are Wordpress, Blogger, SimpleSite. Here is an example of a

typical member's blog -

<http://hughevans.wordpress.com/>

#### Top tip:

Share your thoughts and activities, and comment on the issues that mean the most to you. Maintaining a regular blog could make compiling your annual report all the easier.

**Micro blogs** allow users to share shorter pieces of information. **Twitter** is an example of a micro-blog. Short messages which you post on Twitter are called "Tweets" – they are each limited to 140 characters (letters, numbers and spaces). Tweets are not a private means of communication and can be seen by anyone who is "following" you. Twitter also has a message facility where you can send messages directly to other Twitter users. However, all such personally directed messages can also be viewed by all of your other followers. You can even forward other Twitter users' Tweets to your own followers, by using the Re-Tweet function.

Tweeting is a good way of promoting local events, live tweeting @council meetings and to give links to longer posts. #Jaynecowan

#### Top tip:

Follow and be followed. Twitter is a great tool for finding out what is happening, what people think of local and global issues. Listen first and then simply join in the conversation.

**Social Networks** such as *Facebook* are like having your own small website which can include pictures and text and can provide information and photos. Typically these sites allow you to update people on what you are doing or thinking through a 'status' update and allow you to talk about who you are, what's important to you, what you have done and your plans. You can invite people to be your 'friends' and also set different levels of access to your account, so some people can see all the information about you or you can make less detail available to others. You can also use Facebook to communicate with groups or individuals. People who find your page, comments or proposals of interest can "like" you, which encourages further use, and is a useful way of taking a straw poll of your ideas.

**Linked-IN** is a professional equivalent of Facebook. You can provide information about your career history and skills, and people with whom you are "linked" can endorse you for particular skills. This is a handy site for finding expertise and keeping up-to-date with business developments in your ward or area.

**Flickr, Vimeo, Instagram** and **You Tube** are examples of platforms for sharing videos and photographs. Don't forget to seek permission before taking photos to upload to, or copying images from these sites. **Snapchat** is a photo messaging application for photo, video, drawing and text.

**Communities of Practice** are a way of like minded people joining a community where they can share knowledge and discuss issues relevant to the Community for example the LGA Knowledge Hub.

## 2. Why Should You Use Social Media?

Social media will allow you to open new conversations with the people you represent, and the potential for councillors using social media is huge. Your Council will already have official accounts on Twitter and many also have Facebook accounts. Scrutiny Committees may also be using social media to undertake service reviews.

### So what are the benefits to councillors of using social media?

- Increasing numbers of people are using Twitter and Facebook, as their preferred method of communication. If you have a presence on these platforms you have the potential to establish two- way communication with all of them.
- It's a useful way of finding out what people are talking about locally, their concerns and interests.
- It's useful for finding out about breaking news, the latest research or publication or the latest policy announcements from political parties.
- It's a good way of making the electorate more aware of the work you do personally.

- It's an effective way of coordinating campaigns for example, allowing campaign workers access to your Facebook account.
- Social media allows you to have a conversation with a range of people that you would never be able to physically meet and who do not traditionally seek out their local representatives.
- Social media allows for immediate communication. You can pass on information and receive opinions in minutes. You can forward information from other people equally quickly. "Going Viral" is not necessarily a bad thing, and refers to a mass spreading of a piece of information around the world.
- The local and sometimes national press will follow councillors' on Twitter or Facebook. This means that they know what you are talking about the minute you talk about it.
- Social media is mobile. You can take it around your community, on the train, to a coffee shop or coffee morning or even in bed.
- You can upload pictures and videos, showing for example your role in local events, pictures of potential sites for development, new buildings, local eyesores - a picture tells a thousand words.
- It's free, accounts cost nothing, you probably already have the equipment you need. All you need is time.
- You can receive immediate feedback on your ideas and manifesto to allow

you to modify your proposals in line with local thinking.

- Above all, it can be a lot of fun!

### **3. How to Use Social Media effectively**

Choose your medium and sign up. This is very straightforward and will take you less than five minutes!

Facebook and Twitter are good places to start. You might want to begin with a trial personal account (rather than calling yourself "Councillor Jones") and experiment with family and friends. Make sure that you understand how people find you and who can access your material.

Remember:

- On Facebook you can control who has access to different parts of your account. You can manage what the world sees and what your "friends" see.
- On Twitter the whole world can see everything you Tweet. Even the messages that you Tweet directly to other people can be viewed by anyone unless you have locked down your account to followers.
- When you are ready to set up your final account, consider the identity you use. The name you give yourself online is important as it allows people to find you. Prefacing your Twitter account with Cllr lets people know exactly who you are and indicates that the Code of Conduct will apply.

- You might want to consider setting up a separate personal and “professional” account - you can talk about the amazing food in the restaurant around the corner to your friends and followers in your informal account, and the plans for the new bypass to your friends and followers on your professional account. However, many councillors think that some of their personal comments about food, places they’ve visited, football matches or TV helps break down perceptions of councillors and proves that they are normal like everyone else!

*I use Twitter to speak with residents and engage more broadly. Also to twitter on about books, music, trains and ale, Almost human!*

@LukeOHolland (Cardiff Councillor)

- Make it easy for people to find you online. Many people will start their search for the area that you represent, so make sure you mention your location frequently as that this will then be picked up by search engines. You will also want to make sure that your social media account details are on your business cards, posters and flyers.
- On Twitter, sign up to Tweety Hall and other sites where councillors can be found by their electorate.
- Increase your web presence by linking to other people and sites, leave comments on others’ posts

and encourage others to link with you. The more you are mentioned, the more people will find you.

- Choose your friends on Facebook and who you would like to follow on Twitter. Bear in mind that people know who follows them and will often follow you in return. Find people on Twitter with links to your community, county or region by searching using the ‘hashtag’ (#) symbol to prefix your search-term for example #Reynoldston, #Gower, #Swansea, #South West Wales, #Wales.
- Be disciplined about making time available to write new content and answer your “friends” and “followers”; a regular time each week to update your Facebook status and throughout the day to check Twitter.
- Decide on what you are going to talk about and how. This could be
  - Weekly updates of your own activities as a councillor - don’t forget your pictures! This works better on Facebook as you can include more detail. Remember Twitter is only 140 characters and tends to be more instant and timely.
  - Regular updates on council policies and actions of interest to your community.
  - Links and re-tweets of other relevant national activities.
  - Issues on which you would like feedback.

- Notice of events and public meetings.

**Remember** using social media is all about two-way communication, it's good for providing information to your community or flagging up press statements, but it's better as a tool to get useful feedback. You **will** get feedback and you should expect some people to challenge your ideas or enter into a debate with you online. This is part and parcel of social media.

#### 4. Etiquette and style

- Keep your communications clear, positive, polite and professional. Plain language helps. Many people use abbreviations on Twitter – you'll pick these up as you go along!
- Avoid being ironic or sarcastic, it can be misinterpreted.
- On Facebook, you will need to monitor and, if necessary, censor the contributions that other people make to your site; delete them if they do not match your required standards of behaviour or language. Defamatory and offensive language will be attributed to the publisher as well as the original author and could incur financial liability. It is up to you to decide if you want to remove posts that disagree with your political position, however if you do remove them you may be accused or censoring contributions on political grounds.

- On Twitter, you can block people who are habitually offensive or vexatious. Remember however, blocking them only stops them engaging directly with you, their tweets will continue to be public to all of their followers.
- Bear in mind that constituents may find party political point scoring tedious and prefer to hear information about what you are achieving.
- If you don't have anything to say...don't say anything. Even though it's tempting to let your followers know how busy you are they will soon become bored with constant updates on your day without some relevant or interesting information.

#### 5. Support from the Council

Councillors are generally provided with the ICT equipment that they need to do their job. The Independent Remuneration Panel expects that this will include ICT equipment, support and training.

It is also reasonable to expect that you should also have access to social media sites to enable you to carry out your councillor role more effectively. You do not need the council to set you up with a personal social media account but you should take advantage of any training or guidance provided to help you use it properly.

Most councils have a social media policy. You will need to abide by this and any social media protocols that may have

been agreed when using your “councillor” account.

It’s worth remembering that the council is responsible for any information provided on its website and is subject to legal responsibilities. **You** are personally responsible for the material that you broadcast via your own social media accounts or websites – but more of this later.

Advice will be available to you from a number of council officers. The Monitoring Officer, Head of Democratic Services, the Communications Team and the ICT Manager are likely to have useful advice.

## 6. Social Media and Council Meetings

Recently, especially with the advent of webcasting there has been an increase in interest in the use of Twitter in council meetings. Clearly you will need to be guided by your council’s constitution. Other than what your constitution or social media policy says, there is no legal reason why you shouldn’t use social media from meetings. However, some common sense does need to apply.

- Tweeting on meeting progress and receiving comments from the community can be helpful for transparency and engagement BUT excessive use of Twitter may give people the impression that you are not concentrating on the business in

hand or are even relying on guidance from outside the meeting. For that reason, it is probably sensible not to use Twitter during a planning or licensing debate. Committee chairs may want to decide how to address this in their meetings and you should abide by the rules set out in your constitution.

- Remember, you may not need to tweet about the detail of a meeting - some councils are introducing new arrangements for webcasting meetings and many also have “official” twitter feeds for live on-line conversations to run alongside the meetings.
- If your council webcasts your meetings, this provides a useful way of the public viewing what is happening at first hand and ensures that any video recordings are accurate. Filming meetings informally, whether this is done by councillors or the public may cause difficulties and is usually covered by the Constitution. It may provide a distraction to the proceedings and, if an edited version of events appears on You Tube it might create a false impression.
- Remember that you should not tweet or communicate in any way the content of exempt or confidential business dealt with by local authorities in closed session such as when making formal appointments.

## 7. The Welsh Language

You can use social media in the language of your choice; you do not have to translate your personal Tweets or Facebook accounts.

Councils' social media streams might however be available either separately in Welsh and English or bilingually. The Welsh Language Commissioner feels that there is no need for social media streams to be bilingual as the two separate streams will be accessed by, and sufficient for different communities.<sup>1</sup>

Make sure that you are aware of your Council's rules on the use of the Welsh language set out in your Welsh Language Scheme.

## 8. Golden rules

Think before you tweet or post on Facebook. Do not say anything, post views or opinions that you would not be prepared to:

- Discuss face to face with the person you are speaking about.
- Write on a placard and carry down your high street and discuss and defend with anyone who sees it.
- Be prepared to have minuted in a public meeting – remember, Twitter or Facebook effectively publicly

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.participationcymru.org.uk/home/all-wales-public-service-organisations-internet-and-social-media-survey>

minutes everything for you as you go along!

Remember that once you have said something it may be seen by millions - friends, supporters, political opponents and the press and could be re-tweeted around the world in minutes.

Keep your messages professional, polite and positive.

Remember to try to keep tweets and texts separate – many people tweet comments that they would previously have texted someone privately; this may be about meeting up later (do you want all your followers knowing your plans and gatecrashing your lunch!?) through to 'in' jokes that could be misinterpreted. Don't follow an individual unless you know them or have a good reason for doing so. Some people, such as constituents or council employees, might find it a bit uncomfortable to have their local councillor hanging on their every word.

If you make a mistake admit it. Mistakes happen so don't try to cover it up as there will always be a record of what you've said.

Don't enter into unhelpful online arguments; remember all of your followers or friends will be witnessing this online. Ignore people or block them if they persist in vexatious comments.

Don't tweet or post on Facebook when you are "tired" it's probably sensible to

turn off your phone at any time when you think your judgement may be impaired. Bear in mind that it is possible for your followers and friends to be seen. If you follow or are Facebook "friends" with council employees, contractors who have been procured to provide services to the council, a company or member of the public making a planning application or pressure groups, this *might* be construed as having a close personal association with them and therefore a personal interest.

As with your own leaflets or newsletters, always ask permission before taking a picture that you intend to use. NEVER take photos of children without the express permission of their parents based on an understanding of what you intend to use the picture for. Your council will have a policy on taking pictures of children, take advice on this before taking or using pictures.

Do not allow anyone else access to your social media accounts, protect your passwords, especially if you use a public computer.

Just like email, you can get spam in social media! Be wary about direct messages via Twitter, even from people you know, with messages such as 'Hi, have you seen this photo of you on Twitter?' Delete these before opening, as the spam could then be sent to all of the people you are following...

## 9. Possible Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

### Time and Commitment

Maintaining your social media accounts can take time. Many people start enthusiastically and then allow their accounts to lie fallow. This is risky as friends and followers may think that you are inactive or, worse, unresponsive.

To avoid this:

- Only set up accounts that you can manage, choose either Twitter or Facebook if necessary. It is possible to set up links between the two which will save you duplicating information.
- Set time aside regularly for updates and get used to communicating 'on the hoof'.

### The Law

Councillors new to social media tend to be concerned about the legal implications. It is an important consideration, and some councillors and other politicians have fallen foul of the law, but with careful use and following some ground-rules you will be fine!

The style of communication employed in the social media environment tends to be fast and informal. Messages can appear lightweight and transitory.

Whenever you post something on social media, it becomes a publication, you have effectively made a broadcast. As it is now in the public domain, it is subject

to both the **Code of Conduct** and to various **Laws**.

### **Code of Conduct**

If you conduct yourself on twitter or Facebook as you would in person on the street or in your leaflets, then you will be fine.

Remember that according to guidance from the Ombudsman, the Code of Conduct applies to you whenever you are "Conducting the business of your authority, acting, claiming to act or give the impression you are acting in your official capacity as a member or representative of your authority" Also the Code applies if you "Conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or your authority into disrepute"<sup>2</sup> If you can be identified as a councillor when you are using social media, either by your account name or how you describe yourself or by what you comment upon and how you comment, the requirements of the Code of Conduct apply. Also if you say something that could be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute the Code applies even if you are not apparently acting in your official capacity or do not identify yourself as a member. Remember that the Ombudsman's guidance states that "Making unfair or inaccurate criticism of your authority in a public arena might

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk/en/publications/Guidance-policies.aspx>

well be regarded as bringing your authority into disrepute"

In the same way that you are required to act in council meetings or in your communities you should:

- **Show respect for others** - do not use social media to be rude or disrespectful
- **Not disclose confidential information about people or the council**
- **Not bully or intimidate others** - repeated negative comments about or to individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation
- **Not try to secure a benefit for yourself or a disadvantage for others**
- **Abide by the laws of equality** - do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti faith. Even as a joke or "tongue in cheek"

### **Predetermination**

As a councillor, you are aware that when you act in a quasi-judicial capacity, for example on a planning or licensing committee, you should not make up your mind about an issue that is to be formally decided upon before you had heard all the relevant information. You are allowed to be predisposed to a particular view but not to have gone so far as to have predetermined your position. It is important to remember therefore that

anything relevant you might have said about particular issues on social media could be used as evidence of your having made up your mind in advance of hearing all the relevant information.

### **Criminal Offences**

Don't panic! These generally apply to you already in your conduct as a councillor, but it is worth considering them as they apply to social media:

**Harassment** - It is a criminal offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against someone where this is likely to cause alarm, harassment nuisance or distress.

**Data Protection** - It is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given you their permission. This might apply to your constituents or service users. As a councillor you are a data controller in your own right and therefore personally responsible for what you publish.

**Incitement** - It is a criminal offence to incite any criminal act.

### **Discrimination and Racially Aggravated Offences (or any other protected**

**Characteristic)** - It is a criminal offence to make a discriminatory remark about anyone based on a "Protected Characteristic" as defined in The Equality Act ( such as their race, religion, sexual orientation etc).

### **Malicious & Obscene**

**Communications** - It is a criminal offence to send malicious or obscene communications.

### **Civil Law**

This is where things get more risky for anyone who uses Twitter or Facebook, whether they are councillors, members of the public or celebrities...

**Defamation** - It is against the law to make a false statement about someone which damages their personal or professional reputation. Crucially - even if you simply retweet or pass on information originally posted by others, you may still be held equally as responsible as the original commentator. This can also apply to publishing images. If found liable to another person, you could be ordered to pay large sums of money as damages.

**"High Court: Sally Bercow's Lord McAlpine tweet was libel"**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-22652083>

**Copyright** - The legal ownership of the contents of documents, photos, videos and music belong to the person who created them. You could be in breach of copyright if you reproduce such material without the owner's permission. Always ask for written

consent before you use someone else's material.

**Political Comment and Electioneering** - Remember that although it is acceptable to make political points or canvass votes via your own social media accounts this will not be permissible if you are using this via council supplied computer equipment, certainly in the run-up to elections. The Electoral Commission has further information about the return on expenditure that candidates need to provide on advertising or campaign literature.

## 10. Further Information, Interesting Sites and Sources of Help

Bear in mind that information, sites and terminology change quickly. Facebook is already reporting a drop in users. However, the next big social media platform will soon be on its way. Here are some current examples of information and useful sites but bear in mind that they may be quickly out of date.

Sign on to **Twitter** here  
<https://twitter.com/>

Sign up to **Facebook** here  
<https://en-gb.facebook.com/>

**Tweety Hall.** A platform that gathers all the Councillors that have Twitter accounts in the UK

together so that all their posts can be read in one place and the public can easily find their local councillor. All you have to do to join them is send them a Tweet.  
<http://tweetyhall.co.uk/>

### **Twenty-first century councillors**

<http://socialmedia.21st.cc/>  
Useful guidance for members using social media.

<http://kindofdigital.com/>  
An online innovation agency helping organisations engage online with citizens, communities and stakeholders. Has useful examples of social media guidance.

**LGA's Knowledge Hub** is an example of a community of practice. This one was set up specifically for people working in and with local government and has online fora, libraries full of materials and details of events.

<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/>

**Social Media and Online Collaboration Community.** Join this Community of the Knowledge Hub to talk to other councillors and officers working with Social Media.

## 11. Glossary

### **Blog**

Term derived from Weblog i.e an internet log or diary

### **Blogosphere**

All the Blogs on the Internet

### **Community of Practice**

Group of people who are members of an online 'club' because they have a role or an interest in an area of work

### **Direct Message**

A message sent via Twitter to someone who follows you or who you follow.

### **Facebook**

An example of social networking

### **Flickr**

Photo sharing site

### **Follower**

Someone who has chosen to follow you on Twitter

### **Friend**

Someone who you have allowed to access your Facebook page. Not necessarily a real friend.

### **Forum**

A virtual discussion area

### **#Hashtag**

A hashtag or # is a way of denoting a keyword which can be used as a search term on Twitter.

### **Instagram**

A platform for sharing photos and videos

### **Instant Messaging**

A conversation with one other person via for example *Microsoft Live Messenger* or *Yahoo Messenger*. A conversation which, if you indicate that you are available for a chat is more immediate than e mail and easier to type than a text

### **Microblog**

Short blog e.g. Twitter using a maximum of 140 characters

### **Pintrest**

A virtual pinboard for creating and sharing images

### **RebelMouse**

A free service that connects to your accounts at services such as Facebook, Twitter and/or Instagram. It integrates all your SM Tweets, postings and blogs automatically into one page, boosting your SM presence without you doing anything extra as it 'runs in the background'. It will save you having to tweet your blogs etc. to get more prominence on search engines.

### **Retweet**

To forward a Tweet received on Twitter

## **RSS feeds or Really Simple Syndication feeds**

Messages from websites informing you that new information is available so that you don't have to keep checking the website for updates

## **Social Bookmarking**

A way of saving and sharing all your favourite sites on the web, for example

### ***Delicious***

## **Social networking**

Facebook etc

### ***Snapchat***

A photo messaging application for photos, videos, drawings and text

## **Spam**

Electronic junk mail

## **Trending**

Current popular people or conversations as in *trending on Twitter now...*

## **Troll**

Someone who disrupts online communities or discussions through unhelpful or irrelevant posts

## **Tweet**

A message sent on Twitter

### ***Tweety Hall***

A virtual gathering place for councillors with Twitter accounts

### ***Twitter***

An example of microblogging

### ***Vimeo***

A platform for sharing videos and photographs

## **Wiki**

A tool which enables anyone to add or edit content on a website

### ***Wikipedia***

Online Encyclopedia which works using this method and is therefore not always accurate

### ***You Tube***

A platform for sharing videos and photographs

# Agenda Item 6

**Report To:** Standards committee

**Date of Meeting:** 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014

**Lead Member / Officer:** Monitoring Officer

**Report Author:** Monitoring Officer

**Title:** Declarations of Interest

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## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1 The report is about the requirement placed upon Members to declare their interests in respect of any business before them and the practical compliance with these requirements.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1 To inform the Committee of the requirements placed upon Members in respect of the declaration of interests and the practical compliance with the requirement.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1 That the Committee considers the issues raised in this report and the provision of additional training and support for Members.

## **4. Report details.**

- 4.1 The Local Government Act 2000 (the Act) provides that the Welsh Government may issue a Model Code of Conduct for Members and co-opted members of local authorities. The Act also provides that the Model Code must include provisions relating to the declaration of interests by Members and co-opted members of local authorities before they take part in the consideration of any business of the authority.
- 4.2 The Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct)(Wales) Order 2008 sets out the Model Code of Conduct for elected and co-opted members of local authorities in Wales. This Model Code is the one upon which the Denbighshire County Council's Code of Conduct is based.
- 4.3 Paragraph 11 of the Code of Conduct states that where a Member has a personal interest in any business of the authority and the Member attends a meeting at which the business is to be considered, that Member must disclose orally to the meeting the existence and nature of the interest before, or at the commencement, of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent.

- 4.4 Paragraph 11 also requires that in respect of a personal interest that has not previously been disclosed then either before or immediately after the close of the meeting where the disclosure is made, written notification should be given to the authority which must as a minimum contain details of the personal interest, details of the business to which the personal interest relates and the Member's signature.
- 4.5 The form which is provided for Members to complete in order that written notification of a disclosed interest may be provided to the authority is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.6 The Monitoring Officer has reviewed the declaration of interest forms that have been completed by Members and has found that there are some inconsistencies in the way in which the forms are being completed.
- 4.7 Members will note from Appendix 1 that the Member completing the form is required to insert their name and to delete as appropriate to indicate whether they are a Member or co-opted member of the authority. The deletion is not always completed and while it is fair to say that it is possible for the Member's status to be verified by officers, given that Members and co-opted members are known to them, it may appear as though the form has not been completed properly if it were to be disclosed to the Ombudsman as part of an investigation into a complaint regarding the declaration or non declaration of an interest.
- 4.8 Members will further note in Appendix 1 that there is a requirement to delete as appropriate whether or not the interest declared is a personal or a personal and prejudicial interest. Again, the minutes of the meeting will record whether or not the Member orally declared a personal or personal and prejudicial interest, and indeed whether or not the Member left the room following the disclosure of a personal and prejudicial interest. However, the declaration forms could be requested by the Ombudsman as part of any investigation and may indeed be disclosed for other purposes and it can give the impression that the form has not been completed properly.
- 4.9 Members will also note that the form requires the completion of a box entitled Nature of Interest. This box is intended to provide a description of the interest that the Member is declaring. By and large this is properly completed by Members, however there may be some confusion for some Members who have perhaps not provided a full description, or in some circumstances, have described the nature of the interest as "personal" or "personal and prejudicial".
- 4.10 Members may consider that the design of the form could be improved in order to make it easier for Members to complete. Alternatively Members may suggest that a very short focused training session or briefing note be offered to Members to ensure that the declaration of interest forms are fully completed.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1 The decision has no direct impact on corporate priorities.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1 There are no costs directly associated with this report.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?**

7.1 This report does not require an equality impact assessment.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1 This matter has not been reported or consulted upon elsewhere.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1 There are no obvious significant financial implications arising from the report.

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1 The risk to Members is that a person reading the disclosure form, if it has not been fully completed, may not immediately understand the nature of the interest that has been declared by the Member and this could cause confusion should that declaration be the subject of any later complaint or dispute. The provision of additional training and/or briefing note will assist and remind Members to ensure that the forms are completed correctly.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

11.1 Article 9.2 of the County Council's Constitution.

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DEDDF LLYWODRAETH LEOL 2000



Cod Ymddygiad Aelodau

**DATGELU A CHOFRESTRU BUDDIANNAU**Rwyf i,  
(enw)\*Aelod /Aelod cyfetholedig o  
(\*dileuer un)

Cyngor Sir Ddinbych

**YN CADARNHAU** fy mod wedi datgan buddiant **\*personol / personol a sy'n rhagfarnu** nas datgelwyd eisoes yn ôl darpariaeth Rhan III cod ymddygiad y Cyngor Sir i Aelodau am y canlynol:-  
(\*dileuer un)

Dyddiad Datgelu:

Pwyllgor (nodwch):

Agenda eitem

Pwnc:

Natur y Buddiant:

Llofnod

Dyddiad

**Code of Conduct for Members**

**DISCLOSURE AND REGISTRATION OF INTERESTS**

I, *(name)*

a \*member/co-opted member of

*(\*please delete as appropriate)*

**Denbighshire County Council**

**CONFIRM** that I have declared a **\*personal / personal and prejudicial** interest not previously declared in accordance with the provisions of Part III of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members, in respect of the following:-

*(\*please delete as appropriate)*

Date of Disclosure:

Committee *(please specify)*:

Agenda Item No.

Subject Matter:

Nature of Interest:

Signed

Date

By virtue of paragraph(s) 12, 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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